

# Hetero-Homogeneity

## Some reflections on meeting places in Tensta<sup>1</sup>

Nora Räthzel

When it comes to the dynamics of the city, the individual is always the more vulnerable party. Art rebels against this overpowering structure by strengthening the subjective element.

Heiner Goebbels, composer

Despite academic work presenting a more complex picture<sup>2</sup>, in the public imaginary the “Swedish Suburb” (Svenska förorten)<sup>3</sup> is still a space of disenchantment. One could condense the many problematising narratives into the following picture: isolated from Swedish society unemployed people from distant countries, living on social security, dwell in poorly serviced houses, passing their days in boring idleness. Their many children are doomed from the beginning as they go to school only with their own kind, thus unable to learn the language that would open up their way into mainstream society. Consequently, as they have nothing else to do, these youngsters terrify their neighbourhoods, engage in crime, drugs and violence. “How can you live among all these idiots?” one of our native Swedish informants is asked by his fellow countrymen. Even the “ethnic shops”, which tend to be an object

of exotic excitement in other places, cannot reverse the gloomy picture: “the vegetables are old and presented in uninspiring, dirty stalls. The food in the restaurants doesn’t taste”, another interviewee complains.<sup>4</sup>

My aim here is not to argue about the economic disadvantages of the neighbourhood in question (see footnote 6), but to question the deterministic assumption that underlies problematising representations, namely that poverty and marginalisation necessarily disable individuals to create a meaningful life for themselves. This paper tries to grasp the meaning that people give to their neighbourhood aiming, as Heiner Goebbels suggested for art, to strengthen the subjective element in relation to the structural that is, to make another, the subjective reality of everyday life more visible. The socio-economic conditions of the Swedish suburbs have been widely studied, especially through reports commissioned by the Swedish government, which have been the basis for projects aimed at tackling these conditions<sup>5</sup>. Less attention has been paid to the ways in which inhabitants create the social fabric of their neighbourhood, to the ways in which neighbourhoods *do* function, despite or perhaps through the social conflicts that form part of their

lives. My approach could rightly be accused of being one sided, yet there is a reason for such one-sidedness. It is best expressed by the advice Marco Polo gives to the Chinese emperor in Italo Calvino's book, *Invisible Cities*

The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live today, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space. (1997: 165)

This is what people in many troubled neighbourhoods are doing: creating what is not an inferno in the midst of an inferno. Giving space to these creations, I want to suggest that if they were helped to endure and grow they might provide the point of departure for overcoming those dimensions of life, which constitute the inferno.

### ***Why Tensta? Selection of the field***

This article is part of a wider research project, called: "The Potential of Public Space to Transgress the Boundaries of the Segregated City". It wants to understand how historically evolved spatial, social, cultural, and institutional factors create the basis for "informal, everyday meeting places for people from different population groups" (quote from the research application). As the project involves architects, sociologists, an urban planner and a social geographer, the question is approached from different viewpoints with different methodological and theoretical tools. All members of the project will write a series of articles on different neighbourhoods, emphasising different dimensions of public meeting places (see also Wikström's article in this issue). While in this article I will be looking at the way in which people create meeting places and social relations from below, a future paper will focus on the way in which administrators and politicians judge these activities.

When we designed our research project, we envisaged public meeting places with the potential to transgress practices and structures of segregation predominantly as border spaces between areas with different kinds of populations.

Therefore, the core of our research was to be at the interface of housing areas known as "segregated" and new growth areas, like Husby and the high tech centre in Kista. Tensta, which does not have any such challenging neighbours, mainly made it into the project because during our first interviews with key informants in Kista, Rinkeby, and Husby, we realised that the area of *Järvafältet*, lying at the Northern periphery of Stockholm, must be seen as a unit, as people living in this area interact with each other and move around within it. Some informants stressed the necessity of seeing *Järvafältet* as one integrated area, criticising planning agencies for failing to do so.

Though Tensta does not neighbour a new growth area it forms an administrative unit with a neighbourhood that is in many respects its opposite: Spånga is an area with a low unemployment rate, a predominantly native Swedish population with a higher income, living in detached or terrace houses. Tensta bears the marks of a typical Swedish "million program" housing area<sup>6</sup> with relatively high unemployment, higher degrees of poverty and a population that is predominantly foreign born. To merge these two different areas into one administrative unit was a conscious attempt at "mixing", at creating a multicultural community.

### ***Collecting and analysing the material***

There are different ways of finding out about meeting places: One is observation, visiting public spaces and noting what happens in them: what kind of people come, where do they come from, what do they do, how do they communicate? Some of the answers to these questions must remain speculative and can only be substantiated by asking those who either use and/or manage those places. Furthermore, one can ask people directly where they go to meet others, and one can ask people indirectly for an account of where they have been with whom during a week, a month, a year, and whom they have met. The advantage of such a question is that one can find out about places, of which people do not think when asked directly, or which they would not classify as meeting places. All these methods have been used in this research. In what follows, though, I mainly use information gathered through interviews with people who manage and/or use meeting places and through observation.<sup>7</sup> Interviews can be analysed in many different ways. The literature on this is legion and it is impossible for

me to discuss it here<sup>8</sup>. It is difficult to situate myself within any one of the important approaches (discourse analysis, narrative analysis, thematic analysis, etc.) because I believe that different kinds of statements must be treated and analysed in different ways. Things that are reported as facts (for instance: We have founded the women's centre in 1997) can be verified by looking at other sources. Such verifications are impossible, but also useless, when it comes to the ways in which people interpret such facts, for instance: "We founded it because we felt the need for women to meet on their own." There is no way for us to know if this is really what guided the speaker's action, when she started organising the centre. However, such a sentence gives us important information about the way in which the speaker positions herself within a wider context of social meanings (which can be called cultural, ideological, or discursive, depending on the writer's approach). For instance, this statement implies that the imagined speaker believes "women meeting on their own" is a legitimate reason for starting a centre, and that she either expects the listener to share her view or is trying to convince her. In addition, such a statement informs us about the convictions that guide the acts of the speaker today. There are other elements in interviews, which tell us even more about the ways in which people experience their lives and their living conditions. These are the stories people tell in order to illustrate a conviction, a philosophy which they believe in. Whether such a story happened the way it is described or not, is less important than what it tells us about the meaning and value people give to the philosophy, which the story is meant to express and/or prove. Interviews can help us to understand the way in which people position themselves in a wider context of socially constructed meanings in a given space and time. They tell us something about what people believe, about the philosophy with which they approach their society and their daily lives. In short, what people say can help us to understand their subjective version of their world and actions. To understand this is vital in order to know how and why people reproduce or challenge what we see as objective facts. In this respect, as the driving force of action, subjectivity is itself such an objective fact.

## I. The usage of meeting places: separation, exchange, and the negotiation of differences

### *Who is isolated?*

In this article I will discuss predominantly two places<sup>9</sup>, the *Kultur Kafé* and the women's centre, because I want to focus on self-organised places. I will first look at the way in which people describe what happens in these places and why they are important to them. In the second part, I will put these descriptions and evaluations into a wider theoretical context discussing their meaning for the question of transgression and for the functioning of social relations in a community.

Given our emphasis on liminal places when we designed our research project, it came as a disappointment that all places mentioned by adults as meeting places were situated within Tensta itself. Was it true then, that Tensta's inhabitants acted according to the book, forming an inward looking community, a homogeneous group of people?<sup>10</sup>

Some of the statements pointed in that direction:

Aziz: ... People do not go out [of Tensta] usually, they stay here. I go out very seldom. I do not go anywhere. Before I got married of course, I went to the city, to all those places [cinemas, discos], but since I am married I am a family man. I stay with the family. But when I have guests, then I go out and show them Stockholm. The last time I was in *Stureplan*<sup>11</sup> is perhaps 10 years ago.

Serai and Selma tell me that they hardly ever leave Tensta. When they want to meet people they go to the women's centre or visit friends in their houses.

Ahmed: Most of the time I go to play football, then I watch some TV, then I play football again. *Do you go to the city or do you stay in Tensta?* Sometimes I go to the city, but most of the time I do things in Tensta, I read the newspapers here, and I drink coffee here. I used to go to the disco, but after five years I had enough.

While the two men have a history of having been out of Tensta, the two women only go into the city, when they have to do some shopping. Though all this confirms the notion of inwardness, it might help our understanding to go deeper into the matter and look at what exactly happens in those meeting places.

I shall start with the *Kultur Kafé*, which was founded in 1998 by an association of unemployed people. Three people are fully employed in the kitchen and one as a manager of

the *Kafé*. The first opening session is from eight in the morning to three o'clock in the afternoon, afterwards it is managed by a Somalian association, which runs it until the evening, the closing time depending on whether there is a cultural or political event taking place. It also opens the *Kafé* on weekends, when it is mostly frequented by young people, who play football matches organised by the association (their activities are described below).

The *Kafé* is a place basically carved out of the stairwell of a public two-storey building called *Tensta Träff* (Tensta Meeting place). It lies behind the stairs, difficult to find for someone who doesn't know it. It conveys the idea of provisionality, of an in-between. The back front has large windows and a glass door leading into a yard, where you find some tables laid out in the summer period. Opposite lies the service house, the old people's home. The walls of the *Kafé* serve as an exhibition place for changing art or handicraft objects, often by people living in Tensta. Beside the door leading out into the yard there is a poster with a line from Brecht's Threepenny Opera: "Grub first, then ethics."

During lunch, the place is packed with employees of the Tensta administration offices and you hardly see anyone there who gives the impression of having a migrant background. The picture is reversed in the afternoon, when the Somalian association runs the place and you see mainly non-native Swedes. It is different, when there are cultural events in the *Kafé*, then both native and non-native Swedes attend. The numbers then vary between 20 and 80 persons. Sometimes the place is rented by associations or political groups for a lecture or a gathering.

When I ask Simon from the *Kafé* to comment on my observation that during lunch the *Kafé* is visited mostly by native Swedes, while in the afternoon the visitors tend to be mostly of a migrant background, he answers:

There are a lot of migrants who tend to isolate themselves in their ethnic groups, the associations are very homogeneous ... they isolate themselves.

A similar comment is made by Anna-Lotta, who works at Tensta's library:

... there are a lot of immigrant organisations in this area but they are very separated, Turks meet here and Kurds meet there.

When it comes to another group of users, she explains:

It's really Swedes, I think it's quite difficult to get them to, to, ... I tried to ... because this is so Swedish, a Swedish program, it is very difficult to reach other people. ... And then they also have like, the end of every semester they sit and recommend each other books and that is only for them," "*separatist*", I throw in ironically, "Yes, separatist (laughing), you should not tell them that. It is a closed club ... But they are not so many, the old Swedish citizens, and they meet three times a term, or so, in the library, and I think that is OK.

What is interesting in these two statements is that while in both places one finds native Swedes and migrants described as meeting among each other, only people with a migrant background meeting among themselves are seen as a problem that has to be tackled. Not that either of the informants is unaware of Swedish isolationism, if one wants to call it that way.<sup>12</sup> Yet, it is the perceived behaviour of the migrant population that is considered as the problem to be solved. Why is it that a "closed club" of Swedes is OK, while it is seen as isolation if migrants meet with members of "their own ethnic group"?

In the case of the library group, Anna-Lotta's reason for seeing their "separatism" as unproblematic is that they are only a small group and they have met as a group for a very long time. This is a legitimate reasoning of course, and I do not mean to criticise it. Neither do I want to question the sincerity of Anna-Lotta's and Simon's concern with the "separatism" of migrant groups. Their intention is to assist migrants' integration into Swedish society. My reason for discussing these views is that I see them as connected to a more general perception of majorities and minorities in society. One connection is to what is known in the literature as the invisibility of Whiteness (Delgado/Stefancic 1997). The majority group does not consider itself and is not considered as "ethnic", as being "different" because it constitutes normality. This normality is the standard against which difference is measured; it is not "different", not specific itself. Hence, whenever groups meet separately, it is those who are considered as "different", which are seen as separating themselves.

This process of difference production is especially conspicuous in the literature on segregation: The criteria employed for defining ethnic segregation, is the percentage of foreign born people living in a certain area:

Etnisk segregation kan definieras som åtskiljandet av etniska grupper eller som förekomsten av en separering på "svenska-" och "invandrar"- områden.

SOU 1997:18, pp.52<sup>13</sup>

Despite the mentioning of the two groups in this definition, it is the concentration of *immigrants* that is studied, not the concentration of native Swedes, suggesting that the former constitutes a problem, while the latter does not. Other variables are treated differently. In the case of income, all areas, those with higher and those with lower income are listed. As the authors then go on to explain, the reason for spatial segregation is not to be found in people's ethnicity but in their economic and social conditions. If that is the case, then why is there a chapter about ethnic segregation at all, one wonders? What is described as a problem related to being an "immigrant" is the difficulty to establish oneself on the labour market. As no further reasons for this difficulty are given, one is left with the impression that this at least has to do with the status of being an immigrant. What remains unsaid leaves a space for all sorts of associations to enter: social distance, otherness, incapacity or unwillingness to integrate, isolationism ... whatever dominates the public debate at a given time can be filled in as the "problem" of ethnic segregation.

This does not mean that what is observed as "meeting among themselves" does not happen, but that there are different ways of understanding such a fact:

Aziz: There are a lot of associations who have their own places, but only people who belong to that group go there. That is natural. Why should I go to the Bangladeshi place? Perhaps once a month. But I do go to my own association every day. It's my natural meeting place with my countrymen. We listen to news, we talk, that's a need like water and bread.

One can sense the resistance against the accusation of "self-isolation" in the way in which Aziz emphasises the need to meet among his own countrymen by pointing out its "naturalness" several times. (I will come back to this later)

### ***Confrontation, acceptance, exchange***

We have come back full circle to the image of an inward looking community. However, listening to other parts of Simon's and Anna-Lotta's account and observing some

meeting places it is possible to see another dimension of the neighbourhood unfold. People from all ethnic groups visit the library every day. During cultural events and also during the whole day, a mixture of people from different ethnic backgrounds frequent the *Kultur Kafé*. The Citizens' Centre (*medborgarkontoret*) is another case in point. Not only do people meet the mostly native Swedish employees there, who help them with all sorts of problems in their encounter with the Swedish administration, they also meet other inhabitants of Tensta. Sitting there for about an hour I observed the mixture of visitors. There were men and women of all ages and as far as one could see, with different national backgrounds. Opposite to where I was sitting, an elderly man was disclosing his economic problems in English to a younger woman with an Asian background. She answered by explaining what she saw as the functioning of the Swedish welfare system: it is expected that men and women work, she said, no family can survive on one income only. He replied his wife could not work because his mother was living with them and needed help. Their conversation lasted until it was the younger women's turn to go to the counter. At my right hand side, an older woman, wearing a scarf, explained to a younger one something that had to do with the papers she was carrying, writing down something for her. The conversation took place in Swedish, obviously the mother tongue of the conversants was not the same. These few observations can already serve to shake the image of immigrant communities isolating themselves from each other. At least some of them seem to transcend the borders of their own ethnic groups to communicate their troubles and to help others coping with Swedish institutions. The employees at the *medborgarkontoret* confirm this observation:

People help each other a lot. ... sometimes they just go and look for some young person or child passing by. ... Sometimes we call the women's centre because there are women from all over the world.

For Faride at the women's centre, differences are her main concern – as a challenge and as a chance:

I am optimistic, seeing our young children, because they get along with each other, ... When my daughter went to school a boy from Yugoslavia came into the class in the middle of the war and some boys said they did not want to accept him,



they said, no, I am going to kill all Bosnians. But then one day my daughter came home and said, 'mama, finally they accept him and they don't want to kill him anymore.' It was so good that they started to accept him. No matter what kind of war there is, one can talk to people about things without taking any sides.

Faride's story tells about a process where rejection is transformed into acceptance. Sometimes, such a process goes beyond acceptance: To be confronted with different ways of dealing with what is virtually the same human experience can also lead to change:

One has to accept people, to respect people, without looking at how people look. My hair does not signify my identity. My husband always says, you are a Muslim and you wear a scarf, but in reality you are Swedish. One has to take something from all cultures. For instance, in our culture one has to cry all the time when somebody dies, all the time, when people come to see you, you have to start crying again. Here you just have a meal together with all relatives. I think that is much better, you eat together, you can talk about what has happened. I said to my relatives, that is better, you have to stop this culture, you cannot cry 100 times a day. Put that tradition away, it's stupid, because you only pretend to be crying.

What I find important to discuss here is not which tradition is better – I don't believe there is a way of deciding this question. It is up to any individual to make their choices. – I present this statement because it contradicts the image that migrants in the suburbs are alienated from Swedish society and don't know about its culture. In terms of the Cultural Studies approach one could call Faride's way of combining elements of different cultures a process of "hybridisation" (Hall 2000). Critiques have often claimed that only intellectuals or artists, that is elitist people engage in this process, while so-called ordinary people withdraw into the safe haven of their cultures of origin. Faride is just one example challenging this assumption.

### ***Conflicting social positionings***

Comparing the accounts of Simon and Anna-Lotta with Faride's stories, what is most strikingly different is their way of positioning themselves and others in the social fabric of Tensta through their stories and concerns. While Simon

and Anna-Lotta are concerned with ethnic groups isolating themselves and nurturing prejudices about one another, Faride's view of the neighbourhood focuses on the confrontation and negotiation of differences. Where my Swedish informants were worried, Faride was hopeful. I think this difference is structural, that is, the result of different social positionings. From the point of view of the majority population the behaviour of the minority populations is mostly perceived at certain "problematic" moments, for instance, when a conflict occurs between members of different groups, or when people do not show up at places and times specifically organised for them. These moments of conflict and disappointments become pieces of a puzzle that complete and reproduce a picture that is already existing in the imagery of members of the non-migrant society, engendered through endless discussions about the problems of integration, of isolation, of intra-ethnic conflicts. Each experience with people of the migrant population that can be explained within the framework of that picture, serves to confirm it, even while another part of the person might question this taken for granted image: For instance, when Simon spoke about the poor Swedish of migrant youth, he added: "Maybe it is not true. Sometimes I do not know if what I say is true, because it is difficult to know." Talking about the necessity to have schools with a higher percentage of Swedish children he remarked: "The migrants want to meet Swedes, but the Swedes do not want to meet others, they have a good life, they do not care."

The way in which people formulate their experiences, will almost always include a dissenting voice, the voice that rejects the dominant wisdom. The everyday is complex and contradictory and cannot be packed up into the dichotomising discourses about "them" and "us", although this occurs again and again in public discourses, in media representations, in political talks. At the same time we can expect that the dominant discourse will be the most powerful due to the way in which it is entangled in the historic processes of state and, on the level of the individual, of identity formation. It requires therefore immense efforts to reject it. To question the dominant explanatory framework implies to question one's own position, including the way in which one is trying to make a difference. It includes the capability of giving up one's own approach and adopt another, like Faride did in the case of mourning.

What distinguishes the social position of the majority and the minority population is this: The former is asked to spread its ways of life, while the latter is constantly asked to question and change its way of life. Where Faride lives a life of differences, challenges and change, her Swedish fellow citizens see a static pattern of isolation. From the outside, the minorities never change enough; their constant challenges and changes are not visible. Different social positionings of migrant and non-migrant populations enable certain kinds of knowledge and disable other kinds. The depth of insight into the conflicts and transformations that take place in the everyday lives of migrants, is only possible to see from the inside, that is from the point of view of those who are living these transformations. This might be trivial, but it is often forgotten, when judgements are made about people who are constructed as different.

Social positioning situates individuals and groups within a network of discourses about belonging, appearance (note Faride's demand to respect people, no matter how they look), daily practices, knowledge, or rather deficits (i.e. migrants are people who belong to a specific place, look, behave, act in a certain way, who know certain things, and others, the most important ones like the Swedish language, not). Discourses, as I use the concept here, are not merely symbolic practices but also orders, regulations, the ways in which people are physically positioned in space. One example of such a social/spatial positioning is given by Faride, when she explains why she feels uncomfortable in areas populated predominantly by Swedes:

There you see that sometimes you do not have to talk. If you meet a Swede, sometimes there is this body language, you see when people accept you, but sometimes there are these looks, you do not have to talk a lot, these looks say so much: 'What are you doing here? you belong home, I don't like you'.

Ironically, or rather, tragically, the crossing of the physical border of her neighbourhood, does not imply a transgression of social borders. On the contrary, it is when Faride ventures out of the neighbourhood that she encounters the limits of the integration she has achieved. The limits are not set by herself, but by members of the majority society surrounding her. It is when she leaves her "segregated" neighbourhood that she experiences segregation. Looks and body language (and often also talk) create a segregated mental

space, which people, who are not defined as legitimate members of the majority population cannot transcend. It is the majority itself that has to tear down these mental walls. The looks of which Faride speaks, have the same effect in creating a "no-go mental space" as the design of an expensive looking shopping centre, of which Madanipour says:

Mental space may also be controlled through our fears and perceptions of activities in places. For example, we may be hesitant to enter an expensive-looking shopping centre if we do not have access to the resources needed for the activities there, even though there may not be any physical barrier which would prevent us from going there.

Madanipour 1998: 81

When I told this story to some of my Swedish interviewees, they reacted in a – for me – surprising way: "Have you asked these women, why they still wear a scarf? Why they don't dress in a way that does not attract attention?" Apart from the fact, that there is no way in which people, who differ visually from the majority can transform themselves in order not to attract attention (should they also die their hair and use blue contact lenses? And what about dark skin? Not everybody has Michael Jackson's resources.), this question is symptomatic of a general demand with which migrants are faced, namely to transform themselves and their ways of life in order to blend into the majority population.

There are different ways in which people positioned as migrants deal with this constant demand. Where Aziz defends his right to meet with his fellow countrymen and emphasises his identity as a Kurd:

It is up to me to define who I am, it is none of your business. So the people whom you find here who think they are Swedish, it is their thing, their problem. And if I say, living here, that I am Kurd, which I do, then that is my thing

Faride is more open about her own belongings:

My children, my daughter, and for me, when we go to Turkey, we do not feel at home there any more, people have moved to other places, one does feel more at home here in Sweden. My daughter is more Swedish than Turkish

and about those of migrants in general:

In one way that is true, there are not so many Swedes here, but the people who are here, they are integrated, they are first

from Turkey, Somalia, Lebanon, etc. and for me they are also Swedes.

### ***Intersecting social positionings.***

#### ***Differences and common interests: The women's centre***

There will be different reasons for Aziz' and Faride's different takes on national identity, but one aspect of this difference might be explained by the intersection of social positions. Faride is not only defined as a migrant but at the same time defines herself as a woman. Meeting with her "countrymen" is not an option for her, because it is only men who go to these associations, she says. As an alternative to those meeting places, she took part in creating the women's centre. It was founded in 1997 with assistance and funding from the two projects launched by the city to improve life in the suburbs. It has about 300 members and their needs determine what kind of activities take place: swimming, going for walks, learning Swedish, English, learning to work with a computer, going to the cinema together, going on tours (like a boat trip to a nearby island) having lectures and debating with politicians, who are invited to the centre. The "typical female" activities like sewing and knitting take place as well. Women get help when they need to go to the doctor, to offices, to lawyers.

The centre is situated in the cellar of one of the apartment buildings, a string of rooms to the left and right side of a long corridor, each room decorated lovingly with paintings and handicraft partly made by the women who visit the centre.

In the daily practices of the women's centre, what the women there have in common is more important for them than what separates them from each other in terms of "ethnicity", even if there are conflicts arising from these – and other – differences. It is this emphasis on common interests as women, which led Faride and others to found a women's centre in the first place. As the histories of class formation and social movements in general have taught us, common interests and common needs are also a basis for learning from each other and for being able to abandon elements of one's own culture in favour of others when it seems suitable.

Such a basis of common interests and needs does not easily govern the relationship between migrants and non-

migrants (as can for instance be observed in the struggles going on until today between black and white feminisms) because there is, irrespective of the individual's wish to transcend it, an unequal power relation built into that relationship. In order to move beyond them, unequal power relations have to be acknowledged first. The intersection of "ethnicity" and gender as in the case of the women using the women's centre is therefore more easily governed by a common interest as women, precisely because there are only a few Swedish women working in the centre. Though there will be different power relations between the women coming from different countries, these are not reinforced by structural factors, that is by being defined as a legitimate part of the Swedish nation state on the one hand, and as an "immigrant" on the other.

I have spent some time discussing the ways in which the women's centre can be seen as a space where transgressions take place, that is where differences are encountered and negotiated, because within the Swedish context such centres are not as taken-for-granted as they are in some other European countries. Coming from Germany, where I learned Italian in a women's centre, was a member of a women-only editorial group for a journal of social sciences (not specifying on questions of gender), often visited a women-only café and worked together with neighbourhood based girls' centres, I was puzzled to experience that in Sweden "women's centres" are perceived as something that is only "necessary" for women with problems, perhaps especially for working class women with a migrant background, who might practice religious traditions of separating women and men. Thus, as a colleague told me, in his neighbourhood with a mainly middle class population of migrant origin, the question of a "women's centre" would never come up. This is for me an example of a more general problem within Swedish society that I want to discuss in the following passage.

#### ***The benefits of Separation: differentiating between equality and sameness***

The divide between the preoccupation with ethnic conflicts and ethnic segregation by natives and the more positive accounts about conflicts and differences by migrants indicates – to put it in the language of the literature on migrants – some cultural peculiarities of the Swedish way of organising society. One is what I see as an equation of equality and



sameness and the second, a preference to avoid conflicts. The latter is for instance expressed in one of the reports on measures to be taken in a neighbourhood identified as a problem area: “This integrating drive within social policy has been described as one of creating ‘harmonic relations between people and groups of people and opposing social tensions, antagonisms, conflicts and confrontations’ (Olsson 1992, quoted in Cars and Edgren-Schori 1998: 262). The virtues of conflicts and confrontations, their role in allowing people to grow out of their identitarian confines escapes such an aim.

When I visited the youth centre in Tensta my interview partner gave me a paper, which a group of students from *Södertörn Högskola* (the university of Södertörn, a southern area in Stockholm) had written about the centre in the context of their examination. Most surprising for me was the severe critique the students voiced against the practice of the youth centre to reserve one evening only for girls. They quote an author who has evaluated the centre:

Hon anser vidare mycket riktigt att det inte är fruktsamt att arbeta på ett så stereotyperande och reproducerande plan när det gäller att integrera flickor i verksamheterna (eller samhället). Frågan är väl egentligen på vems ansvar det ligger att motarbeta den strukturella underordningen av personer av det kvinnliga könet, ...”<sup>14</sup>

What the authors do not recognize, is that meeting among themselves, may precisely be a way, a necessary means to overcome one’s structural subordination. Such overcoming must be the act of those subordinated subjects themselves. Furthermore, the accusation that providing a space for girls to meet on their own reproduces the stereotype of the migrant girl falls back on the authors (and on the author of the evaluation, which they are quoting). While some girls may want to meet on their own, because their parents do not allow them to meet in a gender mixed place, the demand for “women-only” spaces is an important part of the second wave feminist movement in the West. At the beginning, the organisation of women-only groups served the need to come to terms with one’s own experiences of oppression and to develop strategies of resistance. In the course of the feminist movement and its “normalisation” those spaces were still created for that reason but also simply to be free from the hassles of male behaviour (the male gaze, the chat-

ting up, etc.) towards women; they are spaces where women can relax.<sup>15</sup> It can be argued that the political decision to create women-only places has to be distinguished from the demand of parents not to let their daughters meet young boys. However, even if such a girls-only space is created for such reasons, it may well serve as a space where girls can develop their needs, discuss their problems, develop their own strategies and enjoy each other – just as this happens in the women’s centre. In other words, separation, especially separation from those who are in a position of exercising power over oneself, is one of the conditions to fight against oppressive power relations.<sup>16</sup> As Lefèbvre has pointed out:

... groups, classes or fractions of classes cannot constitute themselves, or recognize one another, as ‘subjects’ unless they generate (or produce) a space. (1991: 416)

The equation of equality and sameness, thinking that if everybody has the same (space, help, support), then everybody will also enjoy equality, is particularly strong in Sweden with its notion of the nation-state as *folkhem* (the people’s home)<sup>17</sup>. In other countries, as for instance in Germany, there has been and still is a discussion about this equation, especially in the area of education. In this context a cartoon became quite prominent in the seventies, which depicts different animals; I think a snail, a fox, a giraffe, a monkey and others standing in line at some distance from a tree. The caption reads: “everybody has the same chance, so climb up the tree.” I cannot venture into the depths and difficulties of this discussion here, but it seems clear that some meeting places in Tensta suffer from this approach to equality that disregards different needs as a result of different power relations. According to Faride, an evaluation of the women’s centre by representatives of the administration followed this approach:

For instance, they say, there are not so many Greeks coming here, there are not so many men coming. Those people can go to the disco. But the women who come here, they do not have any other place, it is the only place where they can come, where we can talk with each other. If you are isolated, you do not feel well, you become sick and then it costs much more to have to go to the hospital.

Her description was echoed by some of my informants in the administration, who claimed, that the women’s centre

was not really open to all women, that they had fights among each other, that they did not work together with other women. There were three different women's associations in Tensta and the administration could not support all of them they said. I have not checked these descriptions thoroughly enough, to decide if these criticisms are valued. However, the underlying assumption that there should be only one place that suits all the different groups of women and their different needs and that harmonious relationships should prevail among women running a centre, seems to reinforce my hypothesis that the focus on sameness (as opposed to equality) and the rejection of conflicts as a necessary and productive part of the social fabric do form the basis on which migrant's organisations in Tensta are (mis)judged.

What I have tried to show through the presentation and discussion of people's descriptions of their neighbourhoods and their meeting places, is the simultaneity between meetings on the basis of commonalities (national associations, the women's centre, girls in the youth centre) and the shifting of positions through confrontations and exchange between people with different national backgrounds (Faride's narratives). In the following second part I will try to develop the meaning of this simultaneity further by using Richard Sennett's vision of "survival communities."

## II. Purified vs. Survival Communities

### *The benefits of mixing*

In his intriguing conceptualisation and defence of anarchy, "The Uses of Disorder", Sennett makes a distinction between purified communities and survival communities. Purified communities are those who produce a myth about themselves as unitary, closely knit communities. Their image rests on the construction of a false, harmonious sameness, which goes hand in hand with a fear of "otherness". Such a myth evolves from

the way in which human beings learn at a certain point in their own growth how to lie to themselves, in order to avoid new experiences that might force them to endure the pain of perceiving the unexpected, the new, the 'otherness' around them.

Sennett 1996: 39

As opposed to this he conceptualises survival communities, which, because they are not or only to a very low degree

governed by centralised powers have to care for their own survival and thus people are bound to communicate, to work together, in order to survive. This necessity to solve conflicts among themselves generates in people the "adult capacities to care and to wonder about the unknown" (1996: 150). The breeding ground for such communities of survival is the virtual absence of bureaucratic institutions as well as spaces densely packed with people who are different:

Such density permits the expression of personal deviation or idiosyncrasy in a milieu where there are too many people thrown together to discipline everyone to the same norm.

1996: 159

Reading some of the literature on the segregated *förorten* (suburb) and listening to the descriptions of ethnic isolation by some of my discussion partners, one might think that Tensta belongs to the first category of communities. This impression might also be invoked by some of the reasons given by its inhabitants for wanting to stay in the area, which often boiled down to what Abdul said: "I know everybody here. If I go to Rinkeby, I know everybody as well, but in the city, I do not know anybody." Does this not sound more like the description of a closely-knit community, than like the densely packed agglomeration of different, conflicting groups, which make up Sennett's survival communities?

And yet many characteristics of Sennett's vision read as if they were developed from stories heard in Tensta. For example, Faride's reflections about her shifting identities, her suggestion to take whatever is useful from each culture, are examples for Sennett's claim about the virtues of conflicting contacts:

Multiple points of contact with different elements in a city diffuse hostility to the point where an individual will despair defining some safe, secure attributes of his own identity and social space ... he begins to become an adult and to feel that his identity instead turns on his very power to reach out and explore.

(156)

When Faride describes why she hopes the future will be peaceful she paraphrases Sennett's claim that conflicts and fears, "especially racial fears, can only be socialized if they are allowed to be expressed and play themselves out." (146).

Our young children get along with each other, they make fun about each other. For instance, when my daughter went

to school, there was a boy, a Jewish boy, and they talked about if they would marry him and they said no, because he is castrated, but essentially they were good friends, they can make fun about each other and therefore they can be good friends.

One can only speculate if the Jewish boy experienced such a description as a joke or rather as an insult. What I do know from my research with young people in Germany is that a sort of “banter”, of jokes related to ethnic stereotypes can signify friendship as well as denigration – it depends on the context.

An appreciation of differences along with a concern for each other was most vividly described by Omar, a member of a Somalian association:

Here you find 30 or 40 countries, very different people, sometimes there is some shouting around, “what are these people doing, what kind of things do they wear?” but normally we get along well. Sometimes there is some struggling, “look here, look at the backside of the centre and in the Underground, you find strange people there.” I know everything, I know the whole environment here, if something happens, if somebody shouts, everybody, no matter which nationality, will come out and help him. You can stop somebody or do something about it. In other environments, in Spånga, if you shout there, nobody will come out. Something like with Anna Lindh could not have happened here. And if it had happened here in Tensta, this person could not have disappeared. People would have run after him. In the city people do not want to be witnesses. Here it is different, here the problems will be solved at once, you will solve the problems right away.

The main elements of Sennett’s survival community are assembled here: The conflicting views and behaviours of people as well as their ability to transcend these differences and conflicts, when there is a need to work together, and the direct engagement with problems that arise in the neighbourhood. There is no backing off into the privacy of the passive onlooker, who does not care about what happens in public because there are central institutions, which will take care of a conflict. At the same time, these virtues of the community are set off against images of Spånga and the city as the spatial symbols for Swedish society. This counter

positioning of the two worlds, the one where people care for each other and the one where people disregard each other is in accordance with the images produced in society at large about Swedes and immigrants. The difference lies merely in the value given to the respective images. While the closer social relations within migrant communities are seen as maybe likeable but outdated by dominant images, it is the distance between people that is described as frightening by Omar. Yet, a closer look shows a more complicated picture. Omar does not paint a harmonious picture of his neighbourhood. He acknowledges conflicts and struggles and later in the interview he says:

The environment does not function here, they throw things on the ground that is not funny, it’s a bad thing. When people drink something they just drop their box on the floor, that is not so nice, of course.

If we understand the relationships in the neighbourhood through Sennett’s analytical concepts, we can interpret them not as the typical social behaviour of backward, not yet urbanised immigrants, but as the result of a community densely packed with differences, where self-organisation is needed and practiced.

There is both, appreciation and critique in Omar’s descriptions. It is this simultaneity of disorder and social order that so many representations of the suburbs miss. Abdul, who likes about Tensta and Rinkeby that he knows everybody, does not describe what he knows as a homogeneous community, but as an accumulation of differences:

My friends are from the whole world, many cultures live here. Jews, Arabs, Africans ... When I say, this is a little planet I mean the whole world is here. You hear so many languages, at least five, six languages on the street: Eritrean, Somalian, Spanish, Finnish, Arabic.

It is precisely the lack of difference, the homogeneity that he fears about living in a Swedish environment:

The Swedes are very efficient (*duktiga*), but they are alone. ... If I would live in Östermalm, then there would be no Spanish there. I would have to be severe. When you go down the stairs, when you go on the street, when you go out, you hear only Swedish all the time, not one other word. So, that would be difficult for me.

I found this emphasis on and valuing of differences over and over again: the trainer in the boxing club explained how each of the six young men who happened to be in the room during our interview came from another country.<sup>18</sup> All the activities that take place in the youth centre include young people with different national backgrounds, even if they are offered by one national group like Taekwondo courses by the Assyrian association. The same is true for football, help with homework, computer courses, help with achieving a driver's license, and all other activities offered by the Somalian association in the *Kultur Kafé*.

### ***Creating place out of non-place: memory and belonging***

To negotiate differences and conflicts, to create spaces for encounters that transcend the boundaries of the home, is not enough in order to develop a feeling of belonging. The *Kultur Kafé* has been created, not only to employ a number of people and to serve lunch to the employees of the surrounding public institutions, but especially to provide cultural events for the inhabitants of the area. One example is the "blue Monday":

there is music by people from different countries, so people can come and listen here. They come from different places. Sometimes people from Spånga. Sometimes there are 50 people, sometimes 100, sometimes 30. There is African music; there is all sorts of music.

These activities are not pure entertainment. The aim is to make a place to live in out of one that was originally built only to house people. Simon explains:

This is a place, which was set up for people to sleep and stay at home and watch TV. There is no life. You have no memories if there is nothing. ... You have to have some places, where you can remember that you did something in order to feel that you like the place, to feel a common interest.

In order to develop a memory at all, people need to connect to physical places. In *The Power of Place*, Dolores Hayden, writes that place memory (a concept she takes from the philosopher Edward S. Casey)

encapsulates the human ability to connect with both the built and natural environment that are intertwined in the cultural landscape. It is the key to the power of historic

places to help citizens define their public pasts: places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing about them in the present.  
Hayden 1995: 46

However, this capacity of places requires, as Simon recognises, that people have been active in them, that they have experienced something that is worth remembering. Otherwise, a place is empty, a non-place as Marc Augé calls it, where no public, not even a private common past can be defined. A place that can trigger memories is a place connected to words and sounds, signifying social contacts and human activities:

... the workshop with its songs and chatter;  
Chimneys and spires, those masts of the city,  
And the great skies making us dream of eternity' (Baudelaire, *Tableaux Parisiens*). Modernity in art preserves all the temporalities of place, the ones that are located in space and in words. Behind the cycle of the hours and the outstanding features of the landscape, what we find are words and languages, (...) Place is completed through the word, through the allusive exchange of a few passwords between speakers who are con-  
niving in private complicity.  
Augé 1995: 66

Sounds, words, music give places their distinctive character; they create a sense of specificity that makes a place and therefore the people experiencing themselves as belonging to this place unique. Memories about places and through places are memories of experiences and encounters with others. They are also stories about the absence of people. Almost everybody I interviewed remembered that Tensta was once home to native Swedes as well. That they had left was felt as a sign of their unwillingness to "live with foreigners, with us". Their absence, the memory of their presence was painful because it reminded people of their marginalisation in society at large.

But there were also memories of support in moments of crisis. To be able to recognize a place as one to which one belongs, a network of social relations has to develop. The Somalian association, which shares the *Kultur Kafé* with the association of unemployed, provides such a network. It cares for a wide array of young people's needs, providing sport events, helping them with homework and studying,



teaching them basic strategies to get a job, accompanying them to different offices; most importantly, it provides them with a social context that understands their backgrounds.

Ahmed explains: Many came without parents and it has been very, very hard for them in Sweden. For example, one boy came in 2001 or 02 without parents. Some people have helped him to come to Sweden. That is hard, he came to the refugee camp. He did not know what he could eat, he did not get any psychological or medical help. There was another one who came from Mogadishu. His parents were killed and his uncle helped him to get away, bought him a ticket. We organised where he could live here, where he could meet other young people, so he felt better. When you come new to Sweden it is difficult, you don't know the language, you do not know what to do, how to behave.

It is a comparable urge to “meet others that have similar experiences” and to create a sense of spatial belonging through organising memorable events of “doing something together” that led some women to set up the women's centre. The act of helping others is in itself a healing experience as Hamide explains:

For two years I had been sitting at home with a depression. And one day I decided that I could not go on like this, my children needed me, so I began to get involved in the women's centre and I started to feel better. Helping others helped me.

As Sennett imagined in his vision of survival communities, when people are left to themselves they have to find ways of creating some kind of social fabric. However, as he also emphasised, in order for these processes to take place, there have to be some resources.

This economic floor, which is the result of technological affluence, can actually permit *greater* regions of conflict than in scarcity societies, because the stakes of group conflict need not escalate to the point where one of the parties must obliterate the other. Sennett 1996: 176

### ***The production of hetero-homogeneous meeting places***

The exclusive resort to areas of sameness (like for instance in middle class and wealthy dwelling areas) can easily lead to the fear of the “other”. However, there is all the difference in the world between a segregation that is imposed on

people and deprives them of their rights to move wherever they want to, or the seclusion within gated communities or rich suburbs, or else the desire to be among “one's own” in order to develop strategies to deal with oppression and inferiorisation<sup>19</sup>.

This is the point where I depart from Sennett's vision in *the uses of disorder*. Or to say it more precisely, I think his vision needs an amendment here. The virtues of conflict, of difference, and collisions of interests notwithstanding, humans are equally in need of moments of rest, where they can discuss their lives with those whom they consider are “the same”. As Aziz needs to meet his countrymen like he needs bread and water<sup>20</sup>, Faride needs to be among women, and girls want to be among girls – sometimes.

There are as many ways of feeling alike as there are of feeling different. It is the balance between the challenges of difference and the securities of a common ground, which enable humans to develop their curiosity and explore the unknown. As much as I can agree on the dangers of a mythical solidarity that excludes otherness evoked by Sennett, I think it is also necessary to develop and nurture solidarities that can transcend differences.<sup>21</sup> This transcending is not fixed, it can happen between women of different national backgrounds today, between men and women as workers tomorrow, between men, women, workers, young, unemployed, and office employees as inhabitants of a neighbourhood the next day. Whilst Abdul enjoys the differences of Tensta's inhabitants he also states: “We are all migrants”.

The way in which the production of a place of belonging serves as a point of departure for producing/encountering new and unknown space is described by Faride, when listing the range of activities undertaken by the women's centre:

We go to the cinema, we went twice into the city. Some women had never been to the cinema before. We saw *My big fat Greek wedding* and then a Swedish film about the police. Then we went out with a boat, more than 100 women, you don't do that on your own. ... Sometimes there are lectures, we have debates, we had a debate with 70 people, when we invited politicians. It is also popular to go swimming on Thursdays. With the group we pay only 35 and the members pay only 10 crowns.

The security of the group, as well as simple material advantages of being in it, enable women to create new places of

encounter, which include different ways of engaging with Swedish society at large. Transgressions take place all the way: in the women's centre the privacy of the home, the family, and ethnic belongings are transgressed. It is the recognition of each other as women, which makes this transgression possible. Once this is achieved, or in the process of being achieved, this can then serve as a springboard for broader ventures into new spaces, for new transgressions.

One could envision the process as an upward spiral, where the circles circumscribe each time a broader space that is created by the women's actions:

... each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space. ... the body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space; conversely the laws of space ... also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies.

Lefèbvre (1991: 170)

Following this insight, we can say that by exploring new spaces for them to go, the women also recreate themselves as different individuals allowing themselves to be influenced by the new spaces into which they venture – and changing the character of those spaces through their presence. These examples allow us to see a space beyond the dichotomy of heterogeneity and homogeneity. What is created here, is a thirdspace (Soja 1996), a hetero-homogeneous space. It is a space where insecurity and security, conflict and the resolution of conflicts, heterogeneity and homogeneity are in constant flux, each one feeding off the other.

The worries about the homogeneity of the outskirts are hence unfounded on two dimensions: They miss the actual diversity of the population, which is much higher than in any traditional Swedish neighbourhood (a point made for instance by Andersson 2001). On the other end of the spectrum, they ignore the need for constructing solidarity as members of a discriminated minority. This is what happens for instance in national associations where people are seen to retreat into themselves. In this respect, “separation” is a necessary condition for the capacity to communicate across differences. Or, to put it again in Lefèbvre's words:

The answer to separation and dispersion is unification, just as the answer to forced homogenisation is the discernment of differences and their practical realization. 1991: 418

It depends on the context, the kind of pressures one has to resist whether one needs to emphasize difference or unity.

The creation of hetero-homogeneous places is an achievement of what Turner called a liminal position, which enables the

liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc. from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses.

Turner 1982: 44.

As people are thrown into a situation, where the old order does not work any longer, they can either try to retain it, usually in a static way, or they can feel free to create new tissues of social fabric. This brings us back to a question raised at the beginning: What is a public space and how are we to understand its liminality, its position in between segregated areas. Perhaps we could say that a public space is any space where people can meet strangers and thus transcend the boundaries of their private homes, their relations to kin and close friends. If we see the social position of people with a migrant background as liminal in so far as they are outside their old order and excluded from the new order they live in, even though they have acquired much of its normalities, then a liminal space can be physically situated in the middle of an area. It is the social position that defines its “in-between” character.<sup>22</sup>

## Concluding:

### Self-organisation and the pitfalls of state funding

It would be unfair to say that Tensta's inhabitants have been left to themselves. Various special projects have been created to tend to their needs: – “Suburban Financial Support Project” (*Ytterstadssatsningen*), “Metropolitan Financial Support Project” (*Storstadssatsningen*) and most recently, “District renewal Project” (*Stadsdelsförnyelse*). However, as many of our informants in different neighbourhoods, not only in Tensta, explained, the problem with these projects is one of too much bureaucracy and too little relying on people's own capacities to deal with their problems<sup>23</sup>. This was one of the descriptions:

The problem is, the administration is not interested in a strong citizenship that intervenes. If somebody wants something that the city does not want, the answer is usually: no.

You cannot get a wastepaper basket if the administration doesn't want it. There are rules for everything and if you'd take away those rule, people would lose their ability to act. ... The administration says, democracy takes too long, so what? Let it take its time.

This is not the place to discuss the results of these projects more in detail. (They have been analysed succinctly in the reports referred to in footnote 20). What is important in the context of my argumentation is the effect this kind of administration has on the social structure of Tensta. Though the aims of the projects were based on the notion of people with special needs and their participation, the structure of these projects, their time limitation, implied that these problems could be dealt with in a given period of time and that during this time the areas would become "normal" or projects would be able to carry on by themselves. Equally, it was assumed that participation could be achieved by setting the agenda from above and inviting people to take part in it. However, the specific needs of people with a migrant background do not only have to do with their position in Sweden but include experiences of war, torture, and displacement. Their experiences in Sweden on the other hand, are marked, among other things, by different forms of racism.

To regard these needs as transitional as is implied when projects are designed for a given number of years, fails to acknowledge that those needs are not specific in the sense that they disappear after a short period of time<sup>24</sup>. Refugees with traumatic experiences, as well as racism against migrants are bound to stay with us for a long time. But more importantly, the places created in Tensta are not specific only, but universal as well. The need to appropriate a place through experiences that become memories, the self-organisation of networks, the creation of a space where one can meet people with similar and different ways of life, are universal human needs.

These needs are not recognised as criteria for supporting self-organised initiatives. One of the civil servants I interviewed explained to me the difficulty of granting money to the *Kultur Kafé*.

Also, one cannot give money to it just because it opens as a meeting place, partly because it coincides with the business activity of being a restaurant and partly because there is nothing new or developing in itself only that there is a mee-

ting place. (...) They have different cultural programs, and we can give money for that. But even then there is some doubt: what is a cultural activity good for, does it increase competence, increase knowledge, or does it only help having a good time in the evening?

The criteria for defining what a good and new activity is have been derived from the tasks the state has in providing education and competence for its citizens. Self-organised activities are then only valued if they are a prolongation of those state tasks, if they are instrumental to achieve usable skills, or to tackle social problems directly (like providing a space for young people to get them off the streets).

In their pamphlet, *Cities for the Many, not the Few*, Amin, Massey, and Thrift suggest:

Citizenship is nurtured through social contact in places you can return to and value as meeting places. ... why not have social centres in every urban neighbourhood, governed from below, with no pressure to attend or undertake prescribed activities, offering recreation, leisure, and meeting rooms? (2000:37)

The peculiarity of wants in Tensta does not lie in those needs themselves but in the ways they need to be tailored to the specific contexts within which they occur. It is this simultaneity of the universal and the particular that is essential to acknowledge. The way in which resources are granted and then arbitrarily withdrawn or reduced endangers the capacity of people to care for their own needs. How are we to understand the contradiction between the implementation of projects to change the living conditions of the disadvantaged, the spending of resources on investigating and writing reports about "segregated areas" and the cutting of resources for projects, which have brought vital improvements to the inhabitants? As an example for the size of recent cuts, which affected some of the places that can be seen as essential for people's well being, this is the list of cuts and insecurities that people reported to me during the week I spent in Tensta in February 2004.

1. The support for the *Kultur Kafé* was cut by half, leaving them close to nothing to organise cultural events.
2. The Citizens' Centre (*Medborgarkontoret*) lost the resources to pay its employees providing translations in 11 languages.

3. The library lost its resources to pay an Arab woman reading stories to Arab children.
4. The women's centre lost half of its resources and was in danger of losing more, which would mean that they would have to give up part of their rooms.
5. The youth centre did not know in October how much money they would receive to spend the next year. With such insecurity every year, one of the main aims of its work, to create a place of continuity is threatened.
6. The director of Tensta Konsthalle, which attracted people from the city centre to the Tensta outskirts because of the high quality of its exhibitions, was fired despite of huge support from the inhabitants of Tensta.
7. The teachers of different mother tongues in primary schools are not paid any more to teach different school subjects in different languages, which sharply decreased children's success in schools.
8. *Livstykke*<sup>25</sup> was reduced to a fraction of its activities – and has been revived again with another kind of funding, limited to one year at the time of writing.

Some of the insecurities have been partly solved now (November 2004), but new ones have occurred. The list is a snapshot of a certain moment, but it indicates the structural problem that faces people involved in the creation and maintenance of meeting places: the need to be constantly worried about funding. During short visits in June and October 2004, during which I talked to three activists, I heard the same introductory talk from every one of them, even before I posed any question:

I am tired, I am worn out, I cannot carry on any longer. I feel that I have wasted all my energies, years of my life. I will give up and take care of myself now.

Whether they will give in to their exhaustion or not, this sharp distinction between their self and their community activities indicates the break up of the link between the individual and her/his social embeddedness. It alludes to the danger that the social fabric that constitutes Tensta's survival community might tear up.

The problem as I see it so far is this: for people to create meeting places, where they can meet as strangers to become active inhabitants of a community by transgressing the confines of their private homes, they are dependent on an "economic floor" as Sennett calls it. The way in which this

"economic floor" is provided through project funding enables people to create those meeting places but disables them to maintain them. They become dependent on formulating their needs in the disguise of projects that can be funded. While this might be easy for some people experienced with bureaucratic procedures, it was felt as a great burden by others. The energy spent on acquiring money, does not only distract people from their original aims, it also increases their dependency on state funding. The practice and perspective of self-organisation, which led them to create a meeting place is transformed into the formulation of aims they do not really have. The struggle for money replaces the struggle for creating fruitful social relations and becomes an aim in itself. Thus, individuals lose their energy that was fuelled by their social desires and they look for solutions in strategies of (re) individualisation.

If my thesis is correct, then one of the main problems that Tensta faces today is the danger of losing its problem solving capacity. There is a danger to exhaust those social networks that make it work as a community from which Sweden could learn, as Teodor from the youth centre puts it:

I think we live in a time, where we have to define: what is integration und what is segregation? (...) In one understanding of integration there is a focus on a group of people who are in a certain way homogeneous, that is Swedes and a fantastically heterogeneous group, they are called immigrants. These have only one thing in common, that they have come from other countries into this country. But that is not an identity. ... For me the main perspective is that people with different backgrounds should meet as equal partners. But the meeting has to take place under conditions of equality. ... I say, we work a lot with integration. Tensta is a very good example for how integration can work, if you look at Tensta as a society in itself. There are people here from all over the world and they prove that they can live together well. There is no better example for integration. If integration means that people with different ethnic backgrounds can live together, then the rest of Sweden can learn a lot from Tensta.

For such a learning process to happen, Tensta (and similar neighbourhoods) must be seen as an integral part of Sweden not as a problem only, but as an avant-garde as well. Turner's description of people in a liminal phase may capture this best: a "kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains



the germ of future social developments, of societal change” (Turner 1982:45).



Nora Räthzel, professor  
Department of Sociology  
University of Umeå  
nora.rathzel@soc.umu.se

## Notes

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2. See among others: Ålund 1997, Molina 1997, Ristilammi 1994, Sernhede 2002, Andersson, Berg, Natland 2001.
3. Franzén (2001) rightly points out that the story is told using the singular. Stereotypes are often connected to the singular, thus naturalising the features they assign to places and people. For instance in German stereotypes of nationalities are usually presented in the singular: *der Franzose*, (the French), etc.
4. For an analysis of such descriptions in the media, see: Ericsson, Molina and Ristilammi (2000).
5. For comprehensive overviews of studies in the Northern countries in general see: Lahti Edmark 2002. Bunar 2003, 2004, who evaluates some of the latest state investments in the areas in Sweden, refers to a large number of such studies.
6. The name derives from a Swedish policy during the 60s to build one million apartments in order to meet the soaring

demands for housing at that time. Well equipped apartments were quickly built at the outskirts of the larger towns. While they were meant to house the Swedish working classes, today they are predominantly peopled by people with a migrant background (being foreign born or having at least one foreign born parent). These are some of the statistics for Tensta: The average income in 1999 was 134 500 SEK compared to 229 200 in Stockholm at large. 34,2% of the inhabitants received social security in relation to 7,1% in Stockholm; 50,9% of the people between 20 and 64 were in paid employment compared to 75,3% in Stockholm. The unemployment rate was 4,3% in Tensta, 2,4% in Stockholm. 93,2% of the population in Tensta had been on sick-leave or on early retirement in 2001, compared to 45,4% in Stockholm at large (Kings 2004:20)

7. At the time I wrote the first version of this paper, I had interviewed the following individuals and groups. Their positions and names will be changed, when quoting them directly, in order to preserve anonymity. However, it is important for the reader to get an idea of the range and position of the people I have talked to:

1 man working with the *Suburban Financial Backing Project (Ytterstadssatsningen)*, 2 women working in *The Citizens' Centre (Medborgarkontoret)*, 4 men working in the *Kultur Kafé* and a Somali association, 13 women at the women's centre, whereby one interview was a group discussion, 2 men working in the youth centre, 1 man working in an integration centre, 1 woman working in the library, 1 male teacher and 1 female teacher, 2 men and 1 woman working at *Lunda Nova*, a project aiming at integrating Tensta inhabitants into the local labour market. Of these 29 people, 10 worked but did not live in Tensta, 19 lived and partly also worked in Tensta, 21 had a migrant, and 8 – as far as I know – a native Swedish background. In addition, I interviewed 21 young people who attended Tensta Gymnasium of which many lived either in Tensta, Hjulsta, Kista, Husby, or Akalla. Only a fraction of these interviews have been used in this paper. The interviews were semi-structured, starting with an introduction into the aims of our research project and including a few similar questions for everybody, while the majority of questions came up in the context of the conversations. The first question asked for the history and the character of the institution. At some point, depending on where it was suitable, everybody was asked a) what they thought about the image of Tensta as a segregated area, b) what they considered as meeting places in the neighbourhood and which ones they frequented themselves, c) if they wanted more Swedes to live in Tensta, and d) what they would change about the neighbourhood if they had a say. Interviews lasted between one and two hours. With some people I spoke several times on a more informal level without using a tape recorder.

I transcribed the interviews, translating them into English where necessary. Some were done in English, most in Sweng-

- lish, that is, me asking in English and getting answers in Swedish, in some cases I had to use my poor Swedish to pose the questions, one interview was conducted in Spanish. As far as I can judge, communication functioned in all cases.
8. I cannot even begin to list the publications dealing with this question, but as an introductory overview one may consult Holsteing and Gubrium 2003.
  9. Until now I have visited the following places: The Citizens' Centre (*Medborgarkontoret*), the Youth centre, the *Kultur Kafé*, the Library, the Women's centre, *Lunda Nova*, *ABF*, *Tensta Konsthalle*, *Tensta Gymnasium*.
  10. The problem of migrants' associations is described in a government report in the following way: "Many foreign-born are members of various immigrant associations and clubs. However, these clubs are organised on ethnic grounds, often getting together people living in exile. They do not have the essential interplay with the Swedish popular movements. Immigrants' associations often have the function of retaining and reproducing their own specific ethnic culture (SOU 1996: 55)."
  11. A square in the inner city of Stockholm, in an area called Östermalm. As the suburbs signify the "immigrant population", Östermalm and Stureplan signify the "rich happy few".
  12. To my question, if there is any rejection of migrants by Swedish society Simon answers: "Yes, of course ... especially the Somalian groups, they came last, people look down on them, people say they behave funny. Everybody who comes late, people have prejudices."
  13. Ethnic segregation can be defined as a separation of ethnic groups or as the occurrence of a separation between "Swedish" and "Immigrant"- areas. (my translation)
  14. In addition, she thinks very rightly that it is not fruitful to work in such a stereotyping and reproductive way, when aiming to integrate young girls into activities (or into society). But the real question is, whose responsibility it is to resist the structural subordination of persons with a feminine gender, ... (my translation)
  15. Just as an example: a search for women only hotels on the internet produces a range of places in Germany, Switzerland, the US, Canada, Italy, and New Zealand.
  16. For an analysis of how women's activities can be vital for succeeding to survive under conditions of diaspora see Ålund 1991.
  17. This is not at all to deny the enormous benefit of the notion of an inclusionary welfare system based on notions of equality. It seems to me that the problems and contradictions arising from this conflation of sameness and equality have not been analysed and discussed sufficiently, yet. But see for instance Ålund and Schierup 1991.
  18. One comment on this paper was that it failed to analyse the socio-economic conditions of people's lives in Tensta. For instance, the boxing club illuminates the re-enforcement of class relations: historically boxing was the typical sport of working class young men. Now it has become the typical sport for men with a migrant background. I admit to the marginality of such an analysis in this text, the reasons for which I have given in the introduction. My emphasis here is on the negotiations of differences related to national backgrounds and I do not pay attention to the issue of class backgrounds.
  19. I would not say that this practice does not have its problems and dangers, some of which are most eloquently formulated in Paul Gilroy's latest book: *Against Race*. But then every social practice has its dangers, conflicts and disadvantages, the question is hardly ever one of yes or no, but almost always one of how and in which context.
  20. At the same time, Aziz is an extremely social person, known by everyone in the neighbourhood. When I asked interviewees for names of "mediators" in the neighbourhood, his name was mentioned every time, by natives and migrants alike.
  21. Any construction of sameness transcends differences in the end, because people are different down to the concreteness of their proper subjectivity and beyond that, given the complex and contradictory identities of every individual.
  22. This is why suggestions to retain one's culture while integrating, though well meant, miss the point: "In the 1970s, public policy became based on the concept of integration. The aim was to support different ethnic groups in preserving their characteristics while still being incorporated in Swedish society." (Cars and Edgren-Schori 1998: 255). What happens is the creation of new cultures, not the shifting between one static culture and the other.
  23. See also the evaluation reports by Bunar 2003, 2004, Urban 2003, Kings 2004.
  24. This point is also made by Bunar 2004: 142).
  25. This is an organisation to support women's integration into the labour market by teaching them to produce clothes. I use this formulation instead of sewing, because the work they do really includes everything necessary to producing clothes, from creating the fabric (patterns, colours), the model, to sewing the actual cloth. It is rather a designer workshop than a sewing course and it produces innovative collections presented in a fashion show. The name translates as "bodice" and, according to its founder, this signifies the support and strength that a bodice gives.

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